

Good Morning,

Thank you for having me here today and allowing all of us to provide you an overview of Emergency Medical Service in South Western Pennsylvania.

My Name is Todd Plunkett and I am the Chief of Baldwin Emergency Medical Service. Baldwin EMS is the provider of EMS to 4 communities in Allegheny County. Baldwin, Pleasant Hills, West Mifflin, and Whitaker along with numerous other communities that we assist daily via mutual aid. Our response area amounts to 25 square miles with 70,000 residing residents and a large daily commercial visitor traffic. In this geographical footprint, Baldwin EMS responds to 11,000 dispatched 911 calls and requests for emergency medical services. I have been in EMS since 1989 and have seen the changes and the amazing things EMS has done and the challenges that are ahead of us. I hope that today is a start of more dialogue and potential solutions.

Today my colleagues and I are going to provide you a snapshot of the current EMS systems, our successes and some of our areas of improvement. Today I am going to talk to you about recruitment, retention and staffing. Every year EMT's and Paramedics in Pennsylvania respond to over 2.1 million calls for 911 EMS. State of the art technology, lifesaving techniques and some of the highest trained EMS providers anywhere in the world provide this care every day. EMS continued to provide care throughout the pandemic. EMS by its nature is a physically and demanding career. More and more it is becoming more difficult to recruit and retain personnel.

Today you will hear a common problem plaguing the areas of EMS that we feel are in crisis. That common problem is funding. Without a competitive pay capability EMS loses quality EMS providers to all other sectors of health care, police and fire. In many cases we are unable to attract new personnel into the field due to the lower wages, hard work, difficult and dangerous situations, and the knowledge that the EMS industry does not have a sustainable models for financial stability. Many EMS providers have to work multiple jobs to pay the bills. Leaving one job and driving directly to the next.

For years, EMS has visited schools, colleges and vocational program to help recruit personnel into the profession but we are over shadowed by other jobs making much more for better schedules and less fatigue and mental health impacts.

Currently it is believed that there are over 40,000 listed EMS providers in Pennsylvania but only 12,000 of those function in emergency medical services. We are losing the younger population to the higher paying medical professions.

Over the past 10 years the training institutions have shrunk and it is harder for a young person to find an EMT or paramedic program without traveling great distances. In most cases attending this training does not guarantee them a job. The enrollment numbers are down and the cost of programs are up. Very small scholarships are available but none that are enough to cover costs. And in many cases, to go to paramedic school you have to commit to two years of training and decide to attend and work full time at the same time as school or simply try to live on little to no income. This then sets up this new workforce for an uphill battle for success once they become certified.

The low pay, hard working conditions, and the unknown financial stability for EMS organizations do not produce a favorable view for someone entering the job force.

Each day, there is a shortage of EMS units on the streets. The pandemic exposed this crisis even more but the pandemic alone did not create these problems. EMS in South Western PA is predominately a career force compared to 30 years ago where most EMS agencies were volunteer. There is no longer a safety net in the EMS industry and our ability to surge major emergencies is no longer available.

In 2020 the Department of Health's, Bureau of EMS published a report detailing many of the mentioned issues related to recruitment and retention. Numerous levels of local, regional and state groups have created task forces, committees and other work groups to talk about recruitment and retention but the same outcomes are found. We must find a sustainable model of financial support to bring in new EMS providers and to maintain and retain our current work forces.

In conclusion, EMS providers do an amazing job every day to protect and care for the residents and visitors to Pennsylvania, but we need help to do that.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any of your questions.

Todd Plunkett